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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes integrating "Intercultural Education" as a fundamental part of the overall school curriculum. Intercultural Education implies positive interactions between heterogeneous citizens including those with gender differences, handicaps, race differences, and socioeconomic differences. The basic philosophy of Intercultural Education simultaneously recognizes similarities and respects differences. It is based on the premise that, if individuals are truly accepted for their own worth and more time and resources are placed on human effort, the problems of education in America would most likely decrease. An outline is given of how Intercultural Education may be brought into and implemeted within the existing school curriculum in elementary through higher education. Teaching strategies are described for effectively achieving the goals of Intercultural Education. (JD)

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INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Dorothy K. Williamson-Ige

Concern over decreased academic achievement in schools throughout the United States has generated an abundance of rhetoric calling for educational reform.[1] While some reports have alluded to broader concerns of maintaining educational humanitarianism and fairness, the trendy pendulum is swinging profusely in another direction. In the 1980s, increased emphasis is being placed on the mechanics of teacher preparation and maintenance as well as on student intellectualism, particularly in the areas of mathematics, science, and technology.[2] While it would be foolish to disclaim the flood of mediocrity in education, the argument will be made that both behavioristic skills as well as humanitarian knowledge are essential in moving toward a solution to the problem of excellence in our schools.

In advancing this argument, this work will demonstrate how Intercultural Education can be implemented into existing teacher training programs in elementary through tertiary school curriculum both locally and nationally. It will illustrate how integrating Intercultural Education as a fundamental part of overall school curriculum, rather than as isolated units or courses, could provide one answer to positive educational reform.

Two selected literature categories are germane to this discussion. The first deals with the humanistic elements of education either in various educational reports or responds to these reports. The Action for Excellence and "The Nation at Risk" reports as well as information

by Odden have forewarned of the risk of seeking maximum academic potential at the expense of educational humanitarianism and fairness.[3]

A second literature category concentrates on the need for Intercultural Education. A recent study by Tye and Tye has shown that teachers are greatly influenced by their own backgrounds and often retain ethnocentric worldviews.[4] Elam's research has confirmed that contemporary students favor reactionary policies such as censorship, survival of the fittest, police powers, restriction of religious freedom, and the sterilization of certain groups of people.[5] Works by Ballinger, Brislin, Garcia, Hayden, Sedlacek and Brooks, as well as Toffler have called for Intercultural Education as a means of improving schools and society.[6]

This article differs from past research in that it offers Intercultural Education as an answer to the present "educational crisis." Broadly defined,"Intercultural" implies positive interactions between heterogeneous citizens including those with gender differences, handicaps, race differences, and socio-economic differences.[7] Intercultural Education simultaneously recognizes similarities and respects differences. Our society has many social ills with inadequate education as one of the symptoms. Intercultural Education is based on the premise that if individuals are truly accepted for their own worth and more time and resources are placed on human effort (similar to our present commitment to defense) the problems of education in America would most likely improve. Those who feel ostracized and work to deter educational excellence and societal improvement would more likely expend energy in the opposite direction.[8]

IMPLEMENTATION

The process of holistically implementing Intercultural Education into existing school curriculum in elementary through higher education involves establishing appropriate goals, positive teacher and administrator attitudes and strategies, as well as appropriate evaluation procedures.

Goals - Objectives for accomplishing educational excellence through Intercultural Education should result from input of educational professionals as well as representative parents and opinion-leaders in the community. Goals should be practical and timely. As an example of specific goals, learning about one's community may already be included in school curriculum on any educational level across subject fields. This could easily lead to a discussion of fair housing for all Americans. In this case, technical classes could use mathematics and computers to calculate the results of various re-zoning plans. History, Speech Communication, or Social Studies classes could debate the implications of fair housing over busing. Art, Industrial Arts, and Music classes could place concepts into pictures, models, and songs. As an example of general school objectives, broader goals may include enlightment through multicultural library materials, posters, school media, and staff.

Improvement plans may require additional administration and teacher training, follow-up sessions, as well as research and dissemination programs. Training and research dissemination programs are available throughout the country.[9] These training programs should have built-in features which encourage administration and teacher interaction. Early input from teachers is especially important so that they will be committed to actually implementing training upon their return to classrooms.

Teaching Strategies - In accomplishing Intercultural Education goals, the following strategies can be used in various combinations by teachers, teacher education majors, and administrators in elementary through higher education. Specific strategies may include:

-a serious analysis of Intercultural Education theory versus contradictory administration and teacher attitudes and behaviors. Conduct displayed inside and outside the school in regard to those who think, look, or speak differently can make a statement to students as well as the diverse community.

-role-play and role-reversal simulations related to excellence in schools and society.

-practice in handling fair discussions of controversial intercultural issues which could improve schools and the community.

-appropriate intercultural school audiovisuals, broadcasts, and publications.

-the implementation of Intercultural Education in co-curricular and extra-curricular school activities.

-additional learning materials including literature and games with a multicultural focus of improving both schools and society. These materials can be obtained without difficulty.[10]

-field trips and internships aimed at Intercultural Education and societal improvement.

-guest speaker invitations of appropriate and diverse role-models, parents, as well as radio and television personalities who are seriously interested in a truly integrated education, excellence in schools, and societal improvement.

Implementation should be broad and continual rather than narrow and sporadic. Incorporation of Intercultural Education strategies into existing programs rather than adding new programs will likely provide more impact for less cost.[11]

Evaluation - Objectives should be measurable and fair. In addition to numerical ratings, pre-test and post-test attitude scales as well as a combination of recall and application tests can be especially effective in assessing theoretical and experiential learning. Administrators and teachers in training as well as students in schools should be assessed on the basis of their knowledge and progress rather than on variables such as ethnicity or social status.

DISCUSSION

The decision on whether or not to make a serious commitment to implementing Intercultural Education throughout our educational system as a means of school improvement should not be dismissed lightly. The effects could be serious. For example, what are the advantages of a student reaching his or her academic zenith only to be counseled into low-paying service careers or denied an important and well deserved scholarship due to racial, sexist, or social biases of educational administrators? What are the advantages of a prospective teaching major learning to speak French fluently during the day while participating in anti-Semitic graveyard desecrations or cross burnings on the lawn of the black family who moved next door at night? What are the advantages of a student becoming a percipient computer or mathematics whiz when the same person is not taught to accept other individuals or respect human life? Isolated technical knowledge in the three situations presented can become either futile, impotent of humanitarianism, or outright dangerous. Both cognitive abilities and affective skills are needed to solve the problems of a multi-faceted society.

Intercultural Education should complement proposed changes in improved teacher mechanics and emphasis on technical knowledge suggested

for students. Instituting technical knowledge without concerns for educational humanitarianism and fairness is to treat the symptoms of decreased educational ability while ignoring deeper problems of an anfractuous society. It is similar to putting fresh icing on a stale cake.

CONCLUSION

This article has presented the basic philosophy of Intercultural Education and proposed ways of implementing it through teacher preparation and maintenance as well as with students across school curriculum. Curriculum reform has been proposed here as one solution--not as the only answer to the problem of educational improvement.

As teachers and administrators, there is no set or magical way of improving our educational system. But with sincerity, intelligent minds should be able to carve out something meaningful. Including Intercultural Education as part of one's basic educational philosophy and practice is a start.

NOTES

[1] "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," Congressional Record--Senate, Report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, May 5, 1983, pp. S6059-65; Kenneth A. Tye and Barbara B. Tye, "Teacher Isolation and School Reform," Phi Delta Kappan 65 (January, 1984), 319.

[2] Allan Odden, "Financing Educational Excellence," Phi Delta Kappan 65 (January, 1984), 312 and 316; Gary D. Fenstermacher, "Nineteen Eighty-Four: The Latest Educational Reform Proposal," Phi Delta Kappan 65 (January, 1984), 326.

[3] "Task Force on Education for Economic Growth," Action for Excellence (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1983); "A Nation at Risk," pp. S6060-61; Odden, "Financing," pp. 316-18.

[4] Tye and Tye, "Teacher Isolation," p. 320.

[5] Stanley M. Elam, "Anti-Democratic Attitudes of High School Seniors in the Orwell Year," Phi Delta Kappan 65 (January, 1984), 327-32.

[6] Charles E. Ballinger, Educating for Intercultural Understanding: The Role of the Teacher (Columbus: Ohio Education Association), pp. 2-3; Richard W. Brislin, Cross-Cultural Encounters (New York: Pergamon Press, 1981), pp. 36-9; Ricardo L. Garcia, Fostering a Pluralistic Society Through Multi-Ethnic Education (Bloomington: The Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1978), pp. 1-49; Rose L. Hayden, "Internationalizing Public Education: What the States Are Doing," International Educational and Cultural Exchange, XII, No. 2 (Fall, 1976) 4-6; William E. Sedlacek and Glenwood C. Brooks, Jr., Racism in American Education: A Model for Change (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976), p. 176; and Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Random House, 1970) pp. 421-22.

[7] Geneva Gay, "Multiethnic Education: Historical Developments and Future Prospects," Phi Delta Kappan 64 (April, 1983), p. 563; Donna M. Gollnick and Philip C. Chinn, Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society (St. Louis: C. V. Mosley, 1983), p. viii.

[8] Toffler, Future Shock, pp. 421-22.

[9] Donald Burnes, Susan Fuhrman, Allan Odden, and Robert Palaich, State-Initiated School Improvement: A Study of Four States (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1983); David Crandall and Associates, People, Policies, and Practices: Examining the Chain of School Improvement (Andover: The Network, 1983); Garcia, Fostering, pp. 47-9; David S. Hoopes, Intercultural Education (Bloomington: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1980), pp. 34-8.

[10] Pierre Casse, Training for the Cross-Cultural Mind (Washington D.C.: The Society for Intercultural Education, Training, and Research, 1981); Garcia, Fostering, pp. 47-9; and Hoopes, Intercultural Education, pp. 34-8.

[11] Odden, "Financing," p. 315.